

## EFFECTIVE CRITICISM

### *Showing someone the light by using specifics, praising their good points*

**H**ow do you tell someone when you think he or she is not doing something the way you think it should be done?

On the other hand, how do you feel when the criticism is directed at you?

There is a delicate art of offering and accepting criticism, an art made necessary, because most people see criticism as a negative process. Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary defines criticism as "to stress the faults of." Synonyms include "blame, censure, reprehend and condemn"—none of them very pleasant actions.

How do you develop this delicate art?

Start by using a different word, suggests Jim Phillips, Employee Development, Blue Cross, Blue Shield Of Michigan. "Feedback" is the word he prefers when dealing with comments on the nature and quality of work produced. Feedback is also preferable to "criticism" because it implies commenting on the good as well as the not-so-good.

The word "objective" is also critical to the process: You should know exactly what's bothering you before addressing the other person. You should also pick the right time to deal with the problem, preferably when it can be immediately corrected.

To help you the next time you're faced with this problem, we've listed 12 points taken from Dr. Hendrie Weinsinger and Norman Lobsenz's book *Nobody's Perfect*. These guidelines will tell you how

to create an environment for constructive criticism, or feedback, and what to cover in your comments so you are a problem solver rather than a fault finder.

1. **Identify the behavior you want to criticize.**  
Direct your suggestions at the behavior you want changed—not at the person.
2. **Make your criticism as specific as possible.**  
For instance, "you missed the deadline for your quarterly report," rather than "you always miss deadlines."
3. **Be sure the behavior you are criticizing can be changed.**  
A person, for example, has little control over losing his hair or having a foreign accent.
4. **Use "I" and "we" statements and avoid threats or accusations.**  
"I think we can work out a better process for distributing the mail," rather than "if you can't distribute the mail on time, I will find someone who can."
5. **Make sure the other person understands your criticism and the reasons for it.** Nothing is accomplished if the person doesn't understand why and how you want his or her behavior changed.
6. **Keep it short and sweet; otherwise, it turns into a lecture and you lose your audience—or worse, build up resentment.**